

1. INTRODUCTION

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The general design concepts of the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) Prototype are presented in this report from both a programmatic and technical perspective. The prototype is being developed under Federal sponsorship, using an interactive process, that includes assistance and guidance from a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) representing 12 States -- Connecticut, Illinois, Missouri, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Wisconsin, and Utah. The Conceptual Design is intended to provide the States with ideas and information about the general capabilities and features of the SACWIS system and to assist them in understanding SACWIS implementation issues.

In addition to the assistance of the SACWIS Technical Advisory Group, other major sources of information have been utilized in developing the SACWIS information system design concepts. These include:

- The Model for Automated Child Welfare Information System, Program/Functional Requirements developed by the Child Welfare Systems Users Work Group. This Group consisted of representatives from 10 States as well as Administration for Children and Families (ACF) systems and program participants.
- The SACWIS Interim Final Rule which was published on December 22, 1993. The Interim Final Rule is designed to support the planning, design, development, installation, and operation of Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information Systems.
- A review of State child welfare information systems under development in seven States -- California, Connecticut, Kentucky, Montana, Oklahoma, Oregon and Texas. States included in the review were considered to represent the state-of-the-art in child welfare information systems development. The product of this review was a candidate list of information system functions to be included in the SACWIS design.
- The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting (AFCAR) Data Entry System Model developed by Walter R. McDonald & Associates, Inc. (WRMA) under a Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) contract. This Model was designed to support the provision and administration of

child welfare services and meet the Federal government's adoption and foster care reporting requirements.

- The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) Technical Assistance Program sponsored by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN). NCANDS is the national data collection and analysis program, carried out by NCCAN in partnership with the States, that provides information on child maltreatment for use by State and national policy-makers, practitioners, and concerned citizens.
- The SACWIS design team members' experience in child welfare, data processing, and the analysis and design of information systems.

1.2 SACWIS BACKGROUND

The development and implementation of Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information Systems is of critical importance as we approach the end of this century. Over the past 20 years, there has been a steady stream of legislation directed at the development of programs that address the burgeoning needs of abused and neglected children and their families. These needs have been heightened by the increased demands placed upon the child welfare system as a result of family problems, such as homelessness, alcohol and drug abuse, and teenage and single parent pregnancy, as well as more general societal problems such as unemployment, poverty, and violence.

A by-product of the various child welfare legislation enacted during this period has been the development of information systems that satisfy the categorical information needs of their related programs, rather than the overall needs of the clients and human services staff who are directly involved in the child welfare service delivery system. Programs such as child protective services, foster care, and title XX, as well as the runaway children program, each have their own informational requirements. In addition, other financial resource programs add major and independent requirements for gathering information regarding eligibility and for the reporting of varying aspects of that information to the sponsoring agencies. These programs include AFDC, Medicaid, Child Support Enforcement, WIC, and many others.

SACWIS is the first legislative initiative that provides resources for the merging and linking of these multiple information requirements into a single child welfare services focused system. The

Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-66), Section 13713 made funding available for the planning, design, development and installation of State automated child welfare information systems.

For a limited window of time, October 1993 through September 1996, States are able to design and implement integrated child welfare information systems utilizing Federal resources specifically earmarked for this purpose. The timing of the SACWIS initiative is particularly opportune in that information systems technology and costs for computer equipment have also advanced to the stage where case workers and supervisors can now have ready access to these tools critical to their daily work and interaction with clients.

1.3 SACWIS GOALS AND REQUIREMENTS

The design concepts discussed in this document are based on several underlying goals which were established by the Administration for Children and Families. They are:

- Provide States with automated support to meet the Adoption and Foster Care reporting requirements through the collection, maintenance, integrity checking and electronic transmission of the data elements specified by the Adoption and Foster Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) requirements, mandated in the final rule (45 CFR Parts 1355, 1356 and 1357).
- Provide for the support of system interfaces and integration necessary for the coordination of services with other Federally assisted programs and for the elimination of paperwork and duplication of data collection and data entry, specifically NCANDS, title IV-A, title IV-D and title XIX.
- Provide more efficient, economical and effective administration of programs within States. This includes program management and administration for all services and case processing.

To achieve these goals, and by using the information sources identified above, the SACWIS Project Team has identified numerous informational and functional requirements which must be addressed by the SACWIS Prototype. These requirements range from specific data elements to general needs and capabilities. For the purpose of developing the SACWIS conceptual design,

these requirements and needed capabilities have been analyzed and grouped into: information requirements and inquiry and reporting capabilities.

1.3.1 Information Requirements

That information cited as generally needed as well as the specific elements which are required have been aggregated into nine categories. Some of these information categories address both case management and program management needs; some focus more on one set of needs than the other. Specifically, these information categories are:

1. **Client identification** - information that is specific enough to uniquely identify each child and adult in a manner that facilitates case management and prevents duplication in caseload counts.
2. **Referral information** - information which records both initial contacts regarding allegations of abuse or neglect and the results of subsequent actions, such as investigations and hearings. A second type of referral information, that which identifies the agency or person who referred the child and the reason for that referral will also be collected, as will any request for service received by the CWS agency, whether from an individual or another agency.
3. **Client background and characteristics** - information about the client's prior involvement with the child welfare sector as well as characteristics of the child or adult that are needed to develop service or treatment plans and to monitor progress.
4. **Family background and characteristics** - pertinent information about parents, siblings and significant others.
5. **Status information** - includes a variety of specific information such as legal status and custody, placement category and location, reason for placement, court of jurisdiction, judge, eligibility status, and information about case priority or activity level.
6. **Resource or service provider information** - identification of service provider, services provided, intake criteria, and so forth.
7. **Service delivery information** - information that focuses on the specific services provided in order to: facilitate an evaluation of the child's or

family's progress, identify any shared responsibility for the client, and permit an assessment of the case outcome in terms of services utilized.

8. **Adoption-related information** - includes information about the child and both the biological and prospective adoptive parents.
- 9 **Case closure information** - includes such things as why the case was closed and when.

1.3.2 Inquiry and Reporting Capabilities

The type and usefulness of information reported was identified as being as important as the categories of information to be captured and maintained. Specifically, to satisfy child welfare services requirements effectively, the following general capabilities are needed:

- the provision to share selected information between program units, agencies, and sectors, in accordance with confidentiality and security policies that support a client's right to privacy as well as a client's rights to receive services;
- the ability to obtain up-to-date information about a particular client;
- the preparation of reminder and schedule information for individuals as well as for groups of clients (e.g., forthcoming court hearings, court and case review dates, listing of service plans due within the next 30 days);
- the preparation of automated or hard copy listings ranging from a list of caseworker's cases to listing of children by placement facility and/or geographical or political jurisdiction;
- the preparation of form letters for requesting information about a client's status or progress or providing feedback;
- the compilation and extract of appropriate Federal data;
- the compilation and preparation of appropriate program administrative and management reports;
- the processing and reporting of various types of general trend analysis as well as specific analyses relating to such things as changes in referral or placement rates; and
- the ability to link to existing financial systems so as to ensure appropriate reporting of program costs.

All of these requirements and capabilities will be discussed in more detail in the rest of this document. A description of the conceptual design document's structure follows.

1.4 REPORT STRUCTURE

This report is divided into three major chapters:

- **An Overview of the Benefits, Capabilities, and Features of SACWIS --** This chapter provides insight into the capabilities and features of SACWIS through an understanding of the benefits it provides to workers, supervisors, and program administrators.
- **SACWIS: A Program View --** This chapter describes the informational requirements of the system by identifying what information SACWIS can store, process, and retrieve. This chapter also describes the organization and relationships of information in SACWIS and presents examples of output products.
- **SACWIS: A Technical View --** This chapter provides an overview of the SACWIS design concepts including a detailed description of the applications and components that comprise the SACWIS system.